

ment; if that there is a future state, the hope of a happy existence in that increases the appetite to deserve it; if that Jesus was also a God, you will be comforted by a belief of his aid and love. In fine, I repeat, you must lay aside all prejudice on both sides, and neither believe nor reject anything because any other persons or description of persons have rejected it or believed it. Your own reason is the only oracle given you by heaven, and you are answerable not for the lightness but for the uprightness of the decision. (To Peter Carr, Jefferson's nephew, 1787. F. IV., 432.)

RELIGION.—Religion, your reason is now mature enough to examine this object. In the first place, divest yourself of all bias in favor of novelty and singularity of purpose. Indulge them in any other subject than that of religion. It is too important, and the consequences of error may be too serious. On the other hand, shake off all the fears and servile prejudices under which weak minds are servilely crouched. Fix reason firmly in her seat, and call to her tribunal every fact, every opinion. Question with boldness even the existence of a God; because, if there be one, He must more approve of the homage of reason, than that of blindfolded fear. You will naturally examine first the religion of your own country. Read the Bible then as you would Livy and Tacitus. The facts which are in the ordinary course of nature you will believe on the authority of the writer, as you do those of the same kind in Livy and Tacitus. The testimony of the writer weighed in their favor in one scale, and their not being against the laws of nature does not weigh against them. But these facts in the Bible which contradict the laws of nature, must be examined with more care, and under a variety of faces. Here you must recur to the pretensions of the writer to impersonation from God. Examine upon what evidence his pretensions are founded, and whether that evidence is so strong as that its falsehood would be more improbable than a change in the laws of nature in the case he relates. (To Peter Carr, Jefferson's nephew, 1787. F. IV., 430.)

RELIGION.—I consider the government of the United States